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ABSTRACT

Self-definition is a thought pattern, scored from imaginative fantasy, which is related to constructive behavioral independence of social norms. Research has shown that self-definition seems related to the opportunity for operant initiative-taking, especially when active and less sex-stereotyped activities are chosen. Senior college women (N=118) in the Michigan Student Study of 1967 responded to four projective sentence cues yielding imaginative story protocols. The sample was followed up in 1970 with a questionnaire regarding educational and career histories, family life, childbearing, and future plans; and again in 1981 with a similar questionnaire including the same four projective sentence cues given in 1967. Repeated story protocols were available for 64 subjects. The story protocols were scored for self-definition. To assess longitudinal changes in self-definition, two subdivisions of the sample were made, one according to the subjects' childbearing and the other according to career patterns. The results indicated that the sample as a whole showed a significant decrease in self-definition from 1967 to 1981. The decrease was most marked for women with children. The group with no children did not decrease significantly. The group with interrupted career or no career also decreased significantly in self-definition and in 1981 was significantly different from the continuous career group. The overall longitudinal autocorrelation of self-definition was not significant. (The coding categories for self-definition scoring system are appended.) (NRB)

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LONGITUDINAL PERSON-SITUATION INTERCHANGES AND THE GROWTH OF SELF-DEFINITION

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Self-definition (Stewart & Winter, 1974) is a thought pattern, scored from imaginative fantasy, which is related to constructive behavioral independence of social norms. The measure represents a continuum which describes the primary source of one's experience of oneself, or in another language, the primacy of internal vs. external factors as causes of one's behavior. Thus, scores do not indicate a particular conscious self-concept or self-schema, nor a particular substantive identity (such as the use of the same term by Tesser & Campbell, 1983). The categories of the scoring system are not overtly related to the self, and thus the measure is not laden with the interpretive complexity of the clinical Thematic Apperception Test, though it is scored from brief Thematic Apperception Test-type story protocols. Scorable story content refers to "implicit beliefs" about the nature of causality; some stories suggest a subjective world-view in which events have understandable causes and actions are planned, while contrasting stories emphasize reflective mental states, ineffective actions, and randomly occurring, "uncaused" events. Thus, the scoring categories seem related to the process of deriving both self-concept and action, with the Self-defined thought pattern reflecting causality and action, and the Socially defined pattern reflecting mental states and inaction. Tesser and Campbell's (1983) proposition that "individuals will effect changes in

self-definition as a function of the social milieu" should actually be true primarily for Socially defined individuals, who are hypothetically more responsive to role demands and social contexts, while Self-defined persons are relatively free from the demands of traditional role ascriptions. (Stewart & Winter, 1974).

The research literature on Self-definition indicates that the measure predicts tendencies toward operant behavioral initiative-taking independent of constraining role norms. Stewart & Winter's (1974) original validation study found that college women who planned full-time careers were higher in Self-definition (in 1971), while women planning to be full-time homemakers scored in the Socially defined range of the continuum. Self-defining women also majored in more scientific and other traditionally male fields of study. Jenkins (1982) reported that Self-defining college senior women were more likely to aspire to and achieve traditionally male careers (in 1967-1970), with Socially defined women preferring traditionally female careers or no career. In addition, the Self-defining women's acievement aspirations and behavior were more often congruent with their personal achievement orientations and independent of both face-to-face social support and constraining role norms. This finding is suggestive of internal causality for Self-defining women. In contrast, Socially defined women's achievement aspirations and behavior were more closely related to the social support they received from significant others and congruent with female role norms, but unrelated to their personal achievement orientations, a finding suggestive of external causality for this group.

Longitudinal gains in Self-definition among college students were related to less stereotyped or counter-stereotypical majors and extra-curricular activities, and participation in sports, in Winter, McClelland, and Stewart's (1981) four-year evaluation of liberal arts education. In their comparison of seven colleges, there were greater gains in Self-definition from freshman to senior years in institutions which encouraged greater freedom of action, and lesser gains or even losses in institutions with strict behavioral codes and prohibitions. Thus, the growth of Self-definition seems related to the opportunity for operant initiative-taking, especially when active and less sex-stereotyped activities are chosen. These findings were consistent for both sexes.

METHOD

The present project originated with Tangri's (1969) study of a stratified random sample of college senior women who participated in the Michigan Student Study in 1967. Of approximately 350 senior women, Tangri obtained data from nearly all of those aspiring to careers not traditional for women (n = 131), and from a random sample of the remaining more traditional aspirants (n = 69). Of the final sample of 200, 118 responded to four projective sentence cues yielding imaginative story protocols. The sample was followed up in 1970 with an extensive questionnaire regarding educational and career histories, family life, childbearing, and future plans, and again in 1981 with a similar questionnaire including the same four projective sentence cues given in 1967. Repeated story protocols were available for 64 subjects.

The story protocols were scored for Self-definition according to

standardized scoring materials by a trained scorer who had attained a scoring reliability of greater then rho = .90. Self-definition scores were uncorrelated with story length (number of words), so no verbal fluency correction was needed.

Additional measures scored from the questionnaire data were chosen to reflect aspects of subjects' life situations and their perceptions of those situations which might be related to longitudinal changes in Self-definition according to theory. The attainment of higher degrees and the woman's involvement in a full-time committed career (continuous with no breaks greater than a year, sporadic involvement, or primarily no career) were expected to be related to increases in Self-definition, since both involve operant behavioral initiative-taking independent of female sex-role norms. Having more children, starting and/or leading organizations, and citing the housewife or mother role as a source of marriage-career conflict were expected to be related to decreases in Self-definition, because all three indicate responsiveness to others as a requirement for success (at the expense of role-independent, autonomous action). In addition, the first and third are strongly connected to the traditional female role. Where measures were scored from open-ended question responses, category agreement of at least .85 was obtained by at least two independent raters.

To assess longitudinal changes in Self-definition, two subdivisions of the sample were made, one according to the subjects' childbearing (children vs. no children) and the other according to career pattern (continuous career vs. interrupted or no career). These divisions were used

because women with continuous careers and/or no children would be expected to increase or maintain the same level of Self-definition, while women with interrupted or no careers and/or children would be expected to decrease in Self-definition over time. In addition, some predictors of interest (e.g., number of children) were logically available or pertinent for only one subgroup.

RESULTS

The sample as a whole showed a significant decrease in Self-definition from 1967 to 1981, as shown in Table 1. This decrease was most marked for women with children; the group with no children did not decrease significantly, and in addition showed more ordinal stability of scores over 14 years (longitudinal autocorrelation r (16) = .41, $p < .10$). The group with interrupted or no careers also decreased significantly, and in 1981 was significantly different from the continuous career group. (It should be noted that there was a significant association between career pattern and childbearing ($\chi^2 = 7.95$, $p < .005$), with 47% of the subjects having children and an interrupted or no career, though about half of the uninterrupted career group had children and half did not. Thus, no inferences about causality should be risked).

The overall longitudinal autocorrelation of Self-definition was not significant (r (62) = .17). However, when 1981 Self-definition was regressed on 1967 Self-definition, career involvement, highest degree, and organizational initiative, 1967 Self-definition made a significant unique contribution to the equation (see Table 2). Despite a significant zero-order correlation

with 1981 Self-definition, number of children did not make a unique predictive contribution in this analysis. Highest degree, career continuity, and organizational initiative also made unique contributions.

A similar regression for the women with children, including also the housewife/mother role measure, indicated that mothers were more Self-defined in 1981 (relative to 1967) if they had greater career involvement and less involvement with the housewife-mother role (as a source of perceived conflict with career). Both of those variables made unique contributions to the prediction of 1981 Self-definition, but 1967 Self-definition was not a significant predictor in this group. In contrast, for the group without children, 1967 Self-definition showed a large partial correlation with 1981 Self-definition (partial r (16) = .70, p = .12), and the other predictors were not individually significant.

For the women with interrupted or no careers, the parallel analyses yielded a significant partial correlation for 1967 Self-definition (r (32) = .47, $p < .05$) with no other unique predictors, while for the continuous career group, organizational initiative was the only unique predictor (partial r (28) = -.45, p .10).

DISCUSSION

Given the association between Self-definition and liberal arts education found by Winter, Stewart, & McClelland (1981), it is possible that our sample was at a theoretically predictable "high point" in 1967 as seniors. In addition, the college environment protects women students to some extent from the ascriptions of the wife-mother role which they will encounter after marriage, both from others and in their own perceptions. In addition,

since most of our sample bore children, they were also vulnerable to the real demands and needs of others, a further constraint on their autonomy. Higher degrees and continuous careers both seem related to the maintenance (or increase, for some women) of Self-definition even in the face of such constraints and role demands. In theory, women with uninterrupted careers and no children should actually become more Self-defined; however, it is likely that many of these women are involved in traditionally female careers which subject them to a different set of female role constraints rather than give them the kinds of autonomy which might be expected in a full-time traditionally male career.

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Table 1. Life Situation Group Differences in Longitudinal Changes in Self-definition

Group	N/n	1967 Mean	1981 Mean	t	r
All subjects	64	.98	.61	3.57***	.17
Career Pattern					
Uninterrupted	30	1.30	.27	1.59	.05
Interrupted/No	34	.71	-1.38	3.43**	.22
Childbearing					
Children	46	1.26	- .74	3.65***	.11
No children	18	.28	- .28	.78	.41+

+ p = .10
* p .05
** p .01
*** p .001

Table 2. Regression of 1981 Self-definition on 1967 Self-definition and Selected Predictors

	Association with 1981 Self-definition	
	Pearson r	Beta
1967 Self-definition	.17	.28*
Highest degree	.34**	.26*
Career continuity	.38***	.28*
Organizational initiative	-.13	-.20+

Note: N = 64, Multiple R = .52, F (4, 59) = 5.40, p .001

\+ p .10
* p .05
** p .01
*** p .005

Coding Categories for Self-Definition
Scoring System*

The following categories are each scored +1.

1. causality: use of explicit causal language
2. reason-action sequence: the plot is organized in such a way that the final element of the story is an action or plan for action which follows logically from the preceeding elements

The following categories are each scored -1.

3. no causality: events occur that appear to have no known causes or that are bizarre and unintelligible within the context of the story
4. mental state ending: the plot is organized in such a way that the final element of the story is a character's feeling ("she was sad"), expressive behavior ("she cried"), or state of being ("then she was alone")
5. ineffective actor: the final element of the story is phrased in passive voice or impersonal construction. It is explicitly stated that characters are helpless or that action is futile and pointless

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* Adapted from Stewart, 1978, p. 1082.